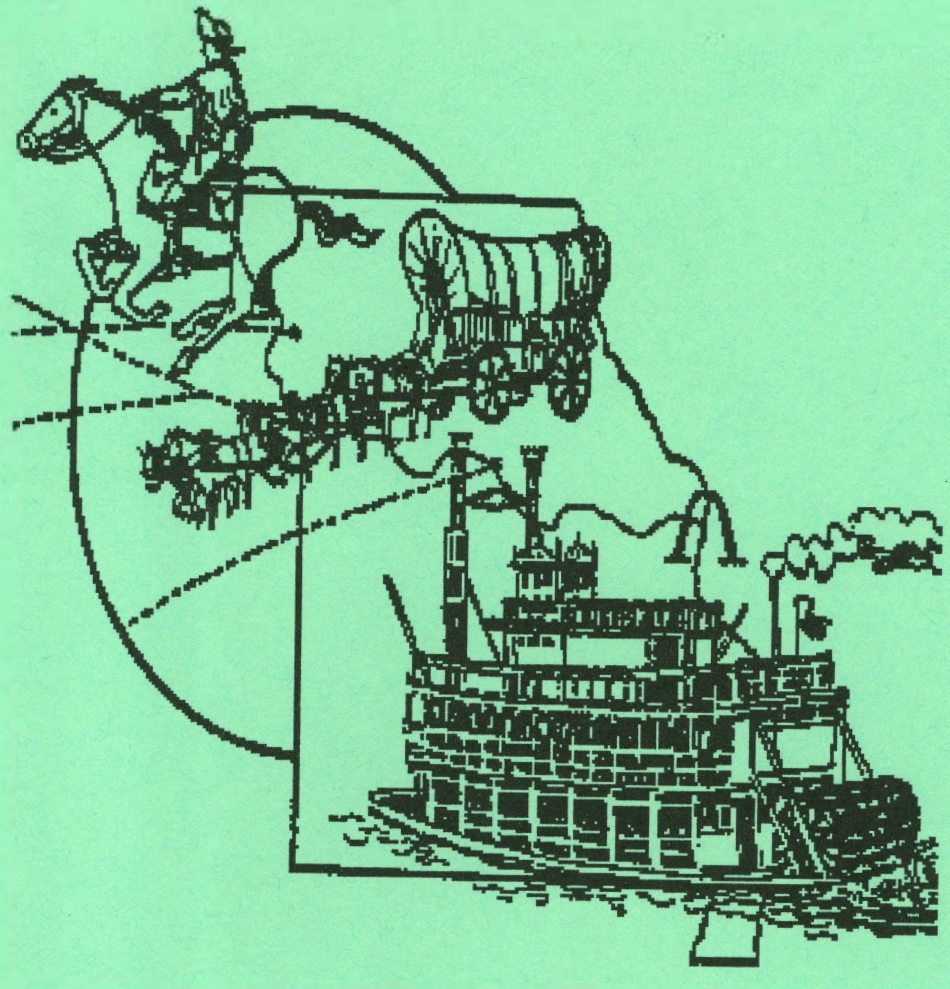

Toward The Setting Sun

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TOWARD THE SETTING SUN

The Historical Journal of the Missouri Conference

The United Methodist Church

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FROM THE EDITOR

The year 1984 was the Bicentennial of American Methodism. There were Methodists in America before that, of course, but Christmas-time in 1784 was the origin of the separate church in America. This journal came out of the preparation for that bicentennial. The Commissions on Archives and History of the Missouri East and Missouri West decided on the foundation of an historical journal for the church in Missouri. I was chosen as the founding editor. I've continued in the position ever since, except for a few years when I was in Nashville, Tennessee, as part of our national youth ministry staff and the journal was not published. The first issue came out in the fall of 1982.

Since the appearance of that first issue, the United States has had any number of celebrations of significant anniversaries. There was the (almost forgotten) bicentennial of the War of 1812. We are currently in the midst of the centennial of the War to end Wars, aka the First World War. We have just finished the sesquicentennial of the Civil War. States and cities across the nation have celebrated major anniversaries of their territory. And now we come to the Bicentennial of the formation of the Missouri Conference. United Methodism and its predecessor bodies have been in Missouri for at least 211 years. And it was 200 years ago this spring that the General Conference voted the organization of the Missouri Conference. It is the story of the beginning of that conference that we tell in this issue of *Toward the Setting Sun.*

Much of the story told in these pages is background. How did Missouri reach the point it had in 1816? What was life like on the frontier in those years? How did Methodism fit into the "wild west" culture of the day? I hope you'll enjoy this issue as much as I have enjoyed researching it and putting it together.

This issue marks another milestone, as well. It is the final issue that I will edit. I've been at it a while (since 1982) and am ready to retire. It's been a great journey. I've worked with some wonderful writers and members of the Commissions on Archives and History. I'm grateful to every one of them – and to you readers who have stayed with us faithfully. I'm proud to announce that my successor is the Rev. David Hutchison. David is pastor of Linn Memorial United Methodist Church in Fayette, as well as on the alumni relations staff at Central Methodist University. He has a love of history and of

the church and is excited about leading the journal in new directions. His work will begin with the Fall 2016 issue. Please give him your enthusiastic support.

I could not leave the journal without thanking two people who have guided it through production and circulation. Joy Flanders, who is also on the staff of Central Methodist University, has faithfully checked the content and corrected the many mistakes that I left in it. She also saw it through the process of printing. John Finley, research librarian at CMU, has managed the subscription list and has collated and stapled the issues of the journal together and put them in the mail to you. Without Joy and John, there would have been no historical journal these past years. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

John Gooch, Editor

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COLONIAL MISSOURI

It was the French who first colonized the Mississippi valley and the territory that became Missouri. They followed the trails blazed by Father Jacque Marquette and Louis Jolliet from Canada south to the Gulf of Mexico. They developed the fur trade, building on the experience they had in Canada and around the Great Lakes. The fur traders and trappers extended their reach up the Missouri River as far as the mouth of the Platte. In 1723, they built an outpost, Fort Orleans, near the mouth of the Grand River. This gave them a trading outlet on the Missouri more than halfway across what would later become the state of Missouri. The French also discovered the lead deposits in southeast Missouri (at Mine LaMott) and began to exploit them.

As early as the 1730s, settlers from Kaskaskia crossed the Mississippi and founded what became Ste. Genevieve. This was the first permanent white settlement in Missouri. In 1762, in the Treaty of Fountainbleau, the French ceded all of Louisiana west of the Mississippi to Spain. The Spanish intended Louisiana to be a buffer between its Mexican empire and the English colonies east of the river. In the interval between the signing of the treaty and the Spanish takeover, the French established another outpost at St. Louis. Pierre Laclede and Auguste Chouteau and party arrived in November of 1763 and built a number of log houses and a stone building to be the headquarters of the fur trading company they represented. St. Louis, in fact, was founded on the fur trade. The little village became the seat of government for upper Louisiana under the Spanish regime. [1]

Even though the Spanish were the nominal rulers of the Mississippi valley, the French remained the dominant part of the population. They founded Carondelet and "Les Petites Cotes" during the Spanish rule. The latter would become St. Charles which, when Lewis and Clark were there in 1804, was a village of about 450 persons.[2] In 1804, the existing French settlements were St. Louis, Carondolet, Creve Couer, Florissant, Portage de Sioux, Riviere Des Peres, St. Charles, Labadie, Cote Sans Dessein (across from the mouth of the Osage River), Fort Orleans (at the

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[1] William E. Parrish, Charles T. Jones, Jr., and Lawrence O. Christensen, *Missouri: the Heart of the Nation* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2004), p. 22-25.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 30.

mouth of the Grand River), Ste. Genevieve, Old Mines, Bellevue, Mine La Motte, Cape Girardeau, and New Madrid.[3] The territory was divided into 5 districts – St. Louis, St. Charles, Cape Girardeau, New Madrid, and Ste. Genevieve.

In colonial Missouri, Ste. Genevieve District (not St. Louis) had the largest population and was probably the most important economically. The lead mines were a key source of this wealth. By 1800, they had exported 438,000 pounds of lead to Europe and to the English colonies along the Atlantic seaboard. The salt springs in the area also enjoyed an extensive trade with Spanish, American, and European markets. Ste. Genevieve was also the leader in the production of grain, which was exported to St. Louis, New Orleans, and all the Spanish settlements along the river.[4]

As in almost all societies, there was great disparity of wealth, education, and culture. The leading families had large libraries. Auguste Chouteau was said to own several thousand books. They sent their children east to schools in the United States, or to Montreal or Quebec City in Canada for education and finishing school. The majority of the population, however, was so occupied with putting food on the table that they had little time for education, hence were illiterate. One settler was asked about a political issue that was raging through the colony. His response was that he couldn't read, so just didn't bother with that sort of thing. That attitude, probably more common than we might think, meant, among other things, that political decisions were made by those who had the wealth and leisure to read, to come together for conversations, to make plans for the future beyond the immediate economic necessities of the day. In reality, this meant primarily the French oligarchs whose wealth was based on the fur trade and on commerce.

In 1800 Napoleon Bonaparte forced the Spanish to return Louisiana to France. This was a step in his dream of a French New World Empire that would shut the British out and make France the leading power in the world. Since England and France were the dominant powers, both in Europe and in the development of colonial empires, Napoleon's dream was a logical extension of the rivalry between the two powers. The two nations had been at war with each other for years, both in Europe and

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[3] David D. March, *The History of Missouri,* Vol. I. (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1967), p. 80.

[4] *Ibid.,* pp. 92-93.

in North America. The dream was shattered when the army sent to settle a slave rebellion in Santo Domingo (the modern Haiti and Dominican Republic) died by the thousands from yellow fever. It was clear that the island would not become a jumping off spot for reconquering an American empire. For Napoleon, Louisiana had now become more of a problem than an asset.

In the New World, the United States was worried about its western territories. The laws closing New Orleans to American goods meant that settlers in the trans-Allegheny territories were restless and President Jefferson feared they might rebel and switch their allegiance to Spain or France, whichever held New Orleans, so that they might be able to ship and sell their goods easily. If Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Northwest Territories, for example, decided it was to their economic advantage to ally themselves to whichever European power held New Orleans, then the young United States would be in danger of losing all the territory between the Appalachians and the Mississippi River and its growth would be stopped in its tracks. Jefferson authorized his ambassador to France to purchase New Orleans and west Florida. This would have given the United States control of the mouth of the Mississippi River, eased the concerns of the western settlers, and ended the fears of secession of the western territories. Napoleon had given up on the dream of an American Empire and desperately needed money for his war against England. Louisiana was a problem he did not need. He offered the United States the whole of Louisiana for a sum of $15,000,000. The United States delegation had no authority to accept this offer, but they feared to delay for instructions from Washington, lest Napoleon change his mind. That $15,000,000 gave the new nation an expansion of 827,987 square miles, doubling its size. In the spring of 1804, Captain Amos Stoddard accepted the turnover of Upper Louisiana to the United States. Meriwether Lewis, ready to leave on the great expedition to explore the territory, was present at the ceremony.

In the last decade of the 18th century, two prominent Americans arrived in Upper Louisiana. The first was Moses Austin, who was involved in lead mining in Virginia and was thrilled at the richness of the lead deposits around Potosi. He became wealthy and was one of the most prominent citizens in Upper Louisiana when it became a part of the United States. He was wiped out in the panic of 1819 and decided to go to Texas. He died before that happened, but his son, Stephen, picked up and led Americans

into Texas. The other was Daniel Boone, who was offered a large land grant to settle in Louisiana. He settled in the Femme Osage area, just west of St. Louis. These two men were typical of the Americans who were being attracted to Upper Louisiana in the 1790s. They were restless, land hungry, and motivated by economic opportunity. They were farmers, fur traders, adventurers, merchants, and became an important part of the new territory. Boone and his sons, for example, were prominent for decades, particularly after they found salt springs in the Boonslick country and developed a thriving business selling salt. The trail to their business became known as the Boonslick trail, and, in later years, U.S. Highway 40 followed the trail almost exactly.

In the last days of Spanish control over the colony, there was a rush to distribute land grants. The U.S. Congress had promised to honor all legitimate land grants made by the Spanish, and everyone wanted to get in on the game. Many who received grants had not met the standards for them. Others, including the French oligarchs, were in for speculation and investment. These included the most prominent names in St. Louis. Still others were going around buying up the smaller land grants for pennies on the dollar. This burst of activity would cause headaches for the incoming U.S. government for decades.

MISSOURI AS THE "WILD WEST"

The new United States government had several key issues with which they had to deal, usually all at the same time. Those issues included confirming or denying the land grants made by the outgoing Spanish, dealing with the Indian nations resident in the state, building the economy, controlling the drive by land-hungry immigrants to take up land that might belong to others, and organizing the newly acquired territory to make it an integral part of the nation. Any one of these issues may or may not have been prominent in 1816 – our sources do not list specific years for many of them – but they all affected what would happen in 1816. National and international events would also play a part.

First, in 1894 – and in 1816 – Missouri was the frontier. The "wild west," if you will. One eastern newspaper said that Missourians were "uncouth savages". [5] The paper based that statement on the frequent duels fought by citizens of the area. The paper went on to say that the area was overrun with "individuals quick to fight with dirks and pistols or to engage in personal bitten off." Given that St. Louis (and the paper was talking primarily about St. Louis) was the center of both the fur trade and the river trade, and that trappers celebrating after a year or more alone in the wilderness, and clashing with river boatmen running into them in taverns or on the streets, it is not surprising that there was violence in the city. David R. McAnally said about St. Louis "there was so much dissipation, and so much infidelity of various shades; so much wickedness and crime of every kind; so many duels and murders, and so little piety, that he was often made to exclaim, 'Lord, who is sufficient for these things?'"[6] As late as 1825 Andrew Monroe witnessed a stabbing murder on the street in broad daylight.[7]

Since, as we shall see below, a part of the preacher's task was to raise the level of morality in the community, that kind of violence had to make a strong impression. It also reminds us that raising the level of morality was a real challenge, given the lawlessness of a certain portion of the population.

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[5] Parrish, et al, p. 43.
[6] David R. McAnally, *History of Methodism in Missouri* (St. Louis: Advocate Publishing house, 1881), p. 319.
[7] John O. Gooch, *Andrew Monroe: Pioneer and Patriarch of Missouri Methodism.* (Unpublished manuscript), p. 12.

Even without the duels and fights, there was plenty of excitement in the seat of government in frontier Missouri. All up and down the Mississippi, new settlers were moving into the territory. The commotion of their wagons, cattle and horses and simply the numbers of people, was enough to cause commotion in the towns. In 1804, the population of Missouri was approximately 10,000 most of it centered along the Mississippi. By 1810, the population had grown to 20,000 and to 67,000 in 1820.[8] We don't know an exact number for 1816, given that the census was conducted only every ten years. But it could easily have been 40-45,000 people. The majority of these new settlers came from Tennessee, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Virginia. They were attracted by rich farmland at reasonably low prices, located along the rivers to make it easier to ship product to market. In addition, given from which states they came, it was important that slavery was not forbidden in Missouri, as it was the old Northwest (north of the Ohio River).

The mention of farmland leads us directly to the issue of land grants with which we closed the previous section of this essay. In 1804, as almost his first act, Amon Stoddard, who was the civil commandant of Upper Louisiana, began the long process of bringing order out of the chaotic land title situation. He found complete and incomplete titles, and titles in various stages of completion. There were Indian titles, squatters with no titles who nevertheless felt they had a legitimate claim to the land, special concession, and general concessions, all of which were made on conditions that may or may not have been met.[9]

`Congress refused to recognize any land titles issued between 1800 and 1804. This was because of the rush to get Spanish grants before Upper Louisiana became a part of the United
States. Congress clearly felt that titles issued in those years were a part of speculation schemes and refused to recognize their validity. This decision led to an uproar, involving all levels of Missouri society, from the oligarchs to the late immigrants. So, in 1805 Congress established a board of land commissioners to examine each claim and determine if it were legitimate or not. By 1812, the board had looked at some 3,300 claims. Because so many of the leading citizens of the territory had vested interests in

[8] Parrish, et al., p. 41.
[9] March, p.214.

the outcome of the board's decisions, the commissioners found themselves at the center of a continual political storm.[10]

In January of 1812, the board approved 1,340 claims, most of them small. The process continued. Frederick Bates, the Recorder of Land Titles, was authorized to continue the process of review. The final claim was not settled until the 1880s.

Another source of land problems arose from a natural disaster. In December of 1811 a giant earthquake struck the New Madrid area. As a result of the quake, actually of a series of quakes and aftershocks, the geography of southeast Missouri was changed. Islands in the Mississippi disappeared. Farms were swallowed up by the quakes and people fled in terror from the area. Reelfoot Lake in Tennessee was another change due to the quakes. The quakes themselves were felt as far away as the Mandan towns on the upper Missouri River and (according to what a National Park ranger in Philadelphia told the writer) rang the Liberty Bell. What to do for those persons who lost their homes and land to the earthquake? After the War of 1812, Congress passed a law allowing any person to exchange damaged land, up to 640 acres, for the same amount of public land elsewhere. Two problems arose from this. The first was that many of those settlers had sold the land to speculators, who would become the prime beneficiaries of the law. The second was that at least some of those same settlers were squatting on land farther west in the territory, land which already belonged to someone else. You can imagine the possibilities for fraud in those situations. In fact, there was so much fraud involved that the U.S. Attorney General finally ruled that the New Madrid claims could not be transferred except by their original owners.[11] This decision cut out the speculators, but still left large areas of uncertainty. One is certain that all the confusion was not cleared up by 1816!

Relationships with the Indian nations in the territory also demanded time and attention. The principal nations were the Osage, Shawnee, Delaware, and the Sac and Foxes. The Shawnee and Delaware had moved to Upper Louisiana because of pressure from whites encroaching on their traditional areas of influence east of the Mississippi. They settled primarily in southeast Missouri and became a concern for the territorial government only when they began to infringe on the traditional hunting grounds of the

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[10] Parrish, et. al., p. 47.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 43.

Osage, the most powerful nation in Upper Louisiana. The Sac and Foxes' traditional territory was in what is now Iowa and northern Missouri. They and the Osage were traditional enemies and often at war with each other. This rivalry caused more than one headache for the territorial government.

President Jefferson had appointed Meriwether Lewis as Territorial Governor, but he did not arrive in the territory until 1808. In the interim, Frederick Bates was Acting Governor and he and William Clark, the superintendent of Indian affairs, governed the territory. When both Lewis and Clark were in the territory, they moved quickly to better relations with the Indian nations. The Osage, the dominant nation, were growing more and more restless about white settlers moving into their lands. (This concern bore a direct relationship to the issue about land claims, discussed above.) The Osage wanted the government to build a trading post in their area to care for their needs. In August of 1808 Clark negotiated a new treaty with the Osage. In return for giving up some 200 square miles of land, the Osage received a promise from the government to build a permanent trading post with a blacksmith shop and mill for their use, and to give them a stipend of $1,500 a year.[12] The result was Fort Osage, built on the south side of the Missouri River in what is now Jackson County. The site bordered the Osage lands, and would be an important outpost on the Missouri River until 1822. Lewis and Clark tried to establish a similar fort on the upper Mississippi during the winter of
1808-09. The location was near the mouth of the Des Moines River, in what is now southern Iowa. In part this fort was meant to strengthen trade with the Sac and Foxes, and in part to defend the Missouri Territory. This was the time of the rebellion stirred up by Tecumseh, probably with encouragement and support from the British in Canada. This is one more example of national events impinging on the story of Missouri. The danger from Tecumseh ended with
the battle of Tippicanoe, when troops under the command of Governor William Henry Harrison of Indiana Territory defeated the Indian uprising. This, in turn, led to more members of the Shawnee nation leaving the old Northwest for land across the Mississippi. The end of the War of 1812 further lessened the danger from Indian attacks. William Clark, then the Governor of Missouri Territory, bargained with the

[12] Parrish, et al., p. 38.

nations and persuaded many of them to exchange their lands in Missouri for other land in Kansas and Oklahoma.

Missouri became a second-class territory just before the War of 1812. "Second-class" was not a pejorative term, in this case, but the name for a step toward statehood. Citizens in a second-class territory could elect the lower house of the territorial legislature, and choose a delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives. This delegate, however, was without a vote. The President of the United States, James Madison at the time, still appointed the territorial governor (William Clark), judges, and the upper house of the legislature. The governor in turn appointed county officials. To vote in a Missouri election or to hold public office, one had to prove citizenship by showing a tax receipt from a territorial or county official. In 1816 Missouri moved to a third-class status, which meant the people could elect both houses of the legislature. This was the final step before statehood.

The town about which we know the most in this period is, of course, St. Louis. It was not the most populous, or the wealthiest, at the end of the colonial period, but it quickly became the jumping off place for westward expansion. It continued as the center of the fur trade, and was also the seat of the territorial government. Still, it remained a raw frontier town. Joseph Charless wrote that, in 1815 "it had but a few manufacturers, no public edifice, no steam mills, nor boats, no bank."[13] That apparently changed quickly. Henry Rowe Schoolcraft described St. Louis in 1818 as a town of about 5,000, with 550 houses, many of which were built of brick or stone. There were 40 stores, a post office, a land office, two chartered banks, one brewery, 2 distilleries, two water mills, one steam flouring mill, and a mill propelled by ox power. There was a courthouse, jail, theatre, three churches, and several public schools.[14] Either a lot happened in two years, or Charless and Schoolcraft did not visit the same town!

St. Louis as the center of the fur trade calls to mind the name of Manuel Lisa, who was a key leader in that trade. In 1807 he and about 45 other men went up the Missouri River as far as the Yellowstone to trap and trade. In 1814, he founded the Missouri Fur Company, in which William Clark was a significant partner. In 1816 he went up the Missouri with a trapping and trading expedition and returned in the spring

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[13] March, p. 329.
[14] *Ibid*, p. 330.

of 1817 with furs valued at $35,000.[15] (In today's dollars, that would be somewhere over a million dollars.) In 1821, the year in which Missouri became a state, furs accounted for 30% of the total value of commerce in St. Louis. So the stories of trappers and traders on which we grew up were based on real life, and were an important part of the economic growth of Missouri Territory, particularly the town of St. Louis.

Frontier Religion

Because Louisiana had been either a French or Spanish colony for so long, the official established religion was Roman Catholicism. In fact, there was a period when Protestants were not allowed to settle legally in the territory. At least in Upper Louisiana this rule seems to have been honored more in the breach than in the observance. In fact, at least one vice-governor invited Protestants to settle in Missouri, being more concerned about security and/or the economy than about strict religious affiliation. It remained, however, that Roman Catholicism as the established church, and the priests were paid by the government. When the territory was turned over to the United States, that government subsidy was no longer available for the priests. They became dependent on their parishioners for their sustenance, which was often not forthcoming. All but one priest left the territory. Only Father James Maxwell stayed on in southeast Missouri. For over a decade, this situation held true. As late as 1818 only St. Louis and Ste. Genevieve had priests. In 1818 Bishop William Dubourg arrived, bringing a torrent of fresh air. Dubourg was a committed leader and revitalized the church. He had the cathedral at Second and Market Streets built; it opened in 1819. It is, today, the "old cathedral,' standing on the grounds of the National Park centered on the Arch in St. Louis. Concurrently, in 1818 Father Francis Niel opened the St. Louis Academy, which today is known as St. Louis University, one of the great institutions of learning in the country. One version of its history is that it began as a Latin school for boys. Another is that it was intended as a school to train Jesuits as missionaries to the Indian nations in the west. In either case, it has long surpassed whatever Bishop Dubourg dreamed for it. Dubourg also invited Mother Philippine Duschene and her order of nuns to come to Missouri and open a school for girls. These women nearly starved and froze their first winter in St. Charles, and then moved to Florissant the next

[15] *Ibid*, p. 366.

summer.[16] From the time of Dubourg's arrival to the present, the Roman Catholic church has been a powerful part of the religious life of Missouri.

Most of the immigrants from the United States were Protestants. The Baptists and the Methodists were the most active on the frontier and the most successful. The 1805 the Baptists founded a congregation in what is now Scott County – Tywappity Baptist Church. (Isn't that a great name?) In 1806 they founded Bethel, south of the present-day Jackson. Here they built the first Protestant house of worship in Missouri. At about the same time, Sarah Barton Murphy started the first Sunday School in Missouri. She was the widow of a Baptist minister and the sister of David Barton, who was an early political figure in the territory and later became a United States Senator from Missouri.[17] In 1816 six Baptist churches in the Jackson area formed the Bethel Association. The Methodists were not the only ones who organized that year!

The Presbyterians arrived in 1816 when Salmon Giddings and Timothy Flint arrived in the territory. In 1817 they organized the first Protestant church in St. Louis. Presbyterians tended to work in the "cities", leaving the scattered settlements and lone cabins to the Baptists and the Methodists.

The Methodists

At the Western Conference in 1805, Bishop Asbury appointed Joseph Oglesby to Illinois, and suggested that he spend some time exploring the prospects for Methodism in Missouri. That would have been quite a challenge for Wesley himself! But Oglesby crossed the Mississippi to St. Charles and then up the Missouri as far as the Femme Osage. He preached at several places, including the home of Flanders Callaway. Callaway was married to Jemima Boone, so the Boone family was an early recipient of Methodist preaching. Several members of the family would become Methodists, but Daniel himself politely declined. His faith, so far as we can tell, tended toward Deism. Oglesby also went as far south as the Murphy settlement (modern-day Farmington) and preached in the home of Sarah Barton Murphy. There is a story that he went with Mrs. Murphy house-to-house into invite children to her Sunday School. Unfortunately, there

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[16] William E. Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri: from Wilderness Outpost to Statehood* (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri Press, 1989), p. 275.

[17] William E. Foley, *A History of Missouri, 1673-1820*, vol. I (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1971), p. 181.

is no documentation for that story. But you will note that the Baptists and the Methodists got along well and worked together, at least to some degree, in those early days. Oglesby reported to the conference of 1806 that there were 200 likely prospects for Methodism in Missouri. That may well have been close to the entire English-speaking population of Missouri in 1805! That kind of optimistic reporting of statistics is an example of what the writer's father always referred to as "Methodist measure".

In any event, John Travis was appointed to Missouri in 1806. To put that date in perspective – Thomas Jefferson was in his second term as President of the United States. Lewis and Clark returned from their journey of discovery at about the same time as Travis was appointed. Zebulon Pike led an expedition to the Rocky Mountains that year – and saw the mountain that still bears his name. During the year 1806-1807, Travis organized two circuits, the "Missourie" and the "Merrimack". The former was north of the Missouri River, the later south of it and centered on the Meramec River valley. Travis reported to the Western Conference of 1807 that there were 56 members in the Missouri Circuit and 50 in the Meramec. Travis probably held a camp meeting in modern-day St. Charles County, with help from James Gunn and William McKendree, who was the Presiding Elder. The camp meeting was the site of the first Methodist Holy Communion in Missouri.[18] This was the "famous" communion service where the elements were cornbread and poke-berry juice. That fact is interesting because poke-berry juice was mixed with iron filings to make ink and is slightly toxic. One hopes that there was no epidemic following the camp meeting!

In 1809 Missouri was a part of the Indiana District. There were six circuits in the district – Illinois, Vincennes, and four circuits in Missouri – Missouri, Meramec, Cold Water, and Cape Girardeau. We have already seen the destructive force of the New Madrid earthquake and its consequences for land titles. There were also consequences for the church. At first, church membership showed a dramatic increase. That should come as no surprise. The earthquake was an apocalyptic event. The earth moved as if it were a liquid and swallowed up homes and farms. There was a stench such as one might imagine coming from the gates of hell. The people were filled with biblical images of judgment and could easily think they were experiencing the end of the world.

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[18] John Gooch, *Circuit Riders to Crusades* (Franklin, Tennessee: Providence House Publishers, 2000), pp. 1-17; and Frank C. Tucker, *The Methodist Church in Missouri, 1798-1939* (Nashville, TN: Parthenon Press, 1966), pp. 14-31.

It was a natural response to turn to the church for hope of salvation. The amazing thing is that, when the initial furor died down, the churches lost so few members. Some church members moved away, seeking (literally) *terra firma* away from the epicenter. But membership statistics offered a more promising future. For example, Cape Girardeau dropped from 138 members to 136, hardly a statistical blink. Cold Water dropped from 158 to 147, which could be accounted for by the restlessness of settlers moving west. Even New Madrid, near the epicenter, dropped only from 165 to 136 members. That loss could easily be a reflection of residents moving away, seeking better land.

It is a truism that Methodism was dependent on the circuit riders, itinerant ministers who preached and provided the sacraments over wide geographical areas. Remember that Joseph Oglesby was appointed to Illinois in 1805 and John Travis to Missouri in 1806. Some later circuits measured 200 miles around the circuit. In 1816, there were 8 ministers for the entire territory of Missouri! But the circuit riders had an influence far beyond their numbers – and far beyond their membership statistics as well. William Warren Sweet points out that the circuit rider (and the frontier ministers of other denominations as well) was a powerful influence in maintaining law and order. They insisted on discipline and order in worship – and in the community. This became a stabilizing influence in the territory. Slavery was a particularly thorny issue in Missouri, as it was in the rest of the South. Ministers led the way in helping ease the conditions of slaves and in reining in the excesses of abusive slaveholders.[19]

Elmer Clark, in an historical address to the St. Louis Annual Conference in 1960, said of the circuit riders:

They were primarily evangelists, who took seriously Wesley's dictum, "you have nothing to do but save souls."

They spoke the definite and concrete language of the people.

They disregarded themselves, their physical welfare, and the desires for a normal life.

They were to build up holiness.

They were careful about instructing children.

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[19] Foley, *The Genesis of Missouri,* p. 277.

They insisted on strict morality. [20]

All six of those statements about the circuit rider are important, but here we want to talk about numbers 1, 4, and 6. Those are important for the Methodist story, and for the life of the frontier. First, the importance of saving souls, an element we seldom talk about these days. Saving souls is more than just getting a person into heaven. It also has implications for the way we live in this life. How, for example, do we practice the command to love our neighbor? If you are a "squatter" on government land, or on a land grant that is being examined by the commission, how do you love the person on whose land you are living and farming? Or, conversely, if you own the land, how do you love the family that is living and farming on it? The circuit riders included questions like these in their preaching and in their talking with families they met on their circuits. If your soul is saved, how do you live it?

Second is the building up of holiness. This is not a call to some kind of righteous piety, but to a life of love for God and neighbor. It has practical implications, both for the way you develop your personal faith and for the way you live with your neighbors. For the circuit riders, as for Methodists (and Baptists and Roman Catholics) in general, it had implications for the issue of slavery for example. We mentioned, above, how the church played a role in frontier life in easing the lot of slaves, even if they could not eradicate slavery. That is a part of holiness.

Third was the insistence on strict morality. The circuit riders – and local preachers – expected the people called Methodists to live out a morality that went beyond conventional behavior. They were a buffer to the violence that prevailed in frontier life. They opposed dueling, and the gun and knife fights in the streets that were all too common. They opposed gambling, shady business practices, and promoted the personal morality of being good family members, not swearing, faithful church attendance, and so on.

These three elements did not miraculously change the frontier, or the rough styles of living that were common on the frontier. But they did change it slowly, in small ways, until their words and examples became the norm for the lives of the people. The change was certainly not complete in 1816, when the Missouri Conference was formed. But

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[20] Elmer T. Clark, "Early Methodism in Missouri," *Journal of the St. Louis Annual Conference* (1960): 105-107.

change was on the way, and the examples of the circuit riders, and of their followers in the Methodist Church, were a big part of the reason.

THE MISSOURI CONFERENCE COMES INTO BEING

The year was 1816. James Monroe was elected President of the United States for the first time. And the Missouri Conference came into being.

The General Conference of 1816 met in Baltimore, Maryland, in the spring. Bishop William McKendree presided. On May 1, the conference was dealing with the required Disciplinary questions. The part that concerns us went like this:

Question 1: What are the boundaries of the annual conferences?

Answer 2: The Missouri Conference shall be bounded by the Ohio Conference on the north, by the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers on the east, and by the Arkansas River on the south.[21]

We note several things about this description. First, the "Missouri" Conference included the states of Indiana and Illinois, and a sizable portion of Arkansas. Second, there was no western boundary mentioned. This was probably the source for the legend that the western boundary was "the farthest cabin toward the setting sun". While that was never, so far as we can tell, a part of the official description, it has served as a title for this journal for some thirty - plus years!

The first meeting of the Missouri Conference was held in the fall. The conference met at Shiloh meeting house in Illinois Territory. This was where Belleville, Illinois, now is. The Shiloh meeting house was the first house of worship built by and for the Methodists in the far west. There were two districts, Illinois and Missouri.[22] We will deal only with the Missouri District in the rest of this article, except to say that the Illinois District, which included at least a part of Indiana, had 2211 members, compared to 949 in the Missouri District.

Membership in the Missouri District, which included Arkansas, was as follows:

	White	Colored[23]
New Madrid	113	2

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[21] *Journals of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.* Vol. I: 1796 – 1836 (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1855), p. 153.

[22] W. S. Woodard, *Annals of Methodism in Missouri: containing an outline . . .* (Columbia, MO: E.W. Stephens, 1893), p. 29.

[23] The designation "colored" is how African-American members were listed in the minutes and is in no way intended to be disrespectful.

Cape Girardeau	112	8
Spring River	90	5
Saline	140	16
Cold Water	154	25
Missouri	116	4
Boonslick	14	
Bellevue	150	
	889	60[24]

Preachers appointed for the year 1816-17 were

Missouri District -- Jesse Walker, Presiding Elder

Boonslick – Joseph Piggott

Missouri – John Schrader

Cold Water - John Scripps

Bellevue and Saline – John C. Harbison, Joseph Reeder

Cape Girardeau and New Madrid – Thomas Wright, Alexander McAllister

Hot Springs – William Stevenson

Hot Springs was a new appointment in that year, a key location in Arkansas. William Stevenson, who was appointed there, became known as the "Apostle of Arkansas Methodism" because he started so many churches in that state. He also preached the first Methodist sermon in Texas, at Pecan Point, at a time when Texas was still Spanish, and therefore Roman Catholic, territory.

From these humble beginnings 200 years ago, the Missouri Conference has grown and become the "mother" of dozens of other annual conferences. Albea Godbold studied the formation and dissolution of annual conferences and concluded that there were 21 annual conferences descended from that original Missouri Conference, and that does not include the Methodist Church in Germany, which was founded by a mission from Missouri.[25] And there has always been a Missouri Conference in the state, both in the northern and southern branches. As we come to this bicentennial of the conference, Missouri United Methodists can be justly proud of our heritage and can look forward to more centuries of service.

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[24] *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Years 1773-1828* Vol. I. (New York: Mason and Lane, 1840), p. 295.

[25] Gooch, p.113.